

Representative

Toby Nixon • 45th District

2002 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW



REPRESENTATIVE TOBY NIXON

CONTACT ME:

441 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
360-786-7878

E-mail: nixon_to@leg.wa.gov

District phone: 425-823-9779

Toll-free legislative hotline:
1-800-562-6000

Committees:

Children & Family Services
Finance
Technology, Telecommunica-
tions & Energy

Dear Friends,

Following my first session as your representative in the state Legislature, it is good to be back home with my family, back to work at Microsoft and meeting with many of you at community events and in your homes to discuss the issues that are most important to you.

My main impression of this session is that it is a work unfinished. The Legislature passed a supplemental budget, but I could not vote to support it. It calls for us to continue spending much more than the state is taking in, and is balanced only because we're borrowing hundreds of millions of dollars. And like a family that has exhausted its credit cards, the day of reckoning will come soon.

The budget cuts education programs in a way that I believe is inconsistent with the Constitutional requirement that education be the paramount duty of the state. It also cuts essential services to our most vulnerable citizens while protecting the jobs of thousands of recently hired state bureaucrats.

The Legislature passed both statewide and regional transportation packages in an attempt to start solving the traffic congestion that is strangling so many of our communities. Both of these packages will require a vote of the people, which fulfills a commitment I made to you.

I greatly appreciate all of the visits, calls, letters and emails I received from so many of you during this session. My staff and I will be working hard over the next few months preparing for the 2003 legislative session. I encourage you to continue to contact me any time there's something on your mind.

In your service,

Toby Nixon
Your State Representative



MARK YOUR CALENDAR! TOWNHALL MEETINGS APRIL 27TH

Woodinville

1-3 pm

Woodinville Library
17105 Avondale Rd. NE

Kirkland

3:30-5 pm

Kirkland Library
308 Kirkland Ave.

Duvall

5:30-7 pm

Duvall Library
15619 NE Main St.

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THE STATE BUDGET: NO SOLUTIONS, JUST DELAYS

Many of us in the 45th District disapproved last year when the Legislature passed a budget that spent about \$650 million more than the state had coming in. Remarkably, in the just-completed session, the House and Senate “fixed” the problem by doubling the earlier mistake.

The revised budget is now \$1.4 billion out of balance. Spending levels were reduced less than \$300 million, or about 1.3 percent. In spite of these severe budget shortfalls, the number of state employees has been increasing. Current cutbacks will likely be met with attrition and unfilled vacancies, and do not get us back to sustainable employee levels.

The final budget draws down the state’s reserve funds to dangerously low levels. It also grabbed a portion of the tobacco settlement payments from each of the next 30 years to pay the interest on a huge \$500 million loan. This tobacco money is supposed to be used on health care and on programs to help people stop smoking and keep teens from starting, but instead will going to pay interest.

When a family has a budget shortfall because of a lost job or a pay cut, do they continue spending like everything is normal, charging groceries and other current expenses on credit cards, hoping that it will be better next year? Or do they reduce expenses to match the lower income? Common sense tells us that reducing spending is the responsible approach, but that’s not what the state has done. All we did is put off the day when the tough decisions will have to be made – and they’ll be even harder to make next year because a big chunk of our money will have to go for interest instead of for services to the people.

WHERE ARE THE PRIORITIES?

The most discouraging thing about the budget is what it doesn’t do. There was no sincere effort to prioritize those things that government ought to be doing, or to meaningfully reduce the size of the bureaucracy. The Washington Management Service, which is where most of the state’s middle and upper level managers are, has grown more than 1,000 percent since 1993. Fewer than half of those people “manage” anyone else.

They have been protected in the budget at the expense of front line services to the families who need them most.

Protecting bureaucrats while cutting programs for seniors, kids, the poor, sick and disabled is wrong and irresponsible, and that’s why I voted against the budget. The simple fact is that the Legislature didn’t “finish” its work at all – it simply quit and went home. In the next session, we’ll face the harsh reality of yet another \$1 billion budget shortfall, credit cards already at their limits and all the savings spent. It will take true leadership to finally make the tough choices, set proper priorities and really balance the budget. I’ll continue to work to see your tax dollars are spent wisely and that state government lives within a budget we can afford!



Rep. Nixon listens intently to a question from a 5th grade student of John Muir Elementary School during a visit to the Capitol rotunda.

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AN OPPORTUNITY TO VOTE ON TRAFFIC CONGESTION RELIEF

I worked hard during the session to make certain that critical roads like I-405, SR520, SR202 and SR203 were included in our transportation planning. My goal continues to be greater road and highway capacity to meet the needs of our growing population so we can get where we need to go and spend more time with our families rather than in traffic.

Two major transportation plans were passed by the Legislature: one statewide and one for the central Puget Sound region. The statewide plan calls for a 9 cent per gallon gas tax increase and a 30 percent increase on weight fees on large trucks, phased in over two years. It also calls for a new, additional 1 percent sales tax on new and used vehicles. The revenue from the gas tax, as required by the state Constitution, will go to highway construction projects around the state. The other taxes will go to ferries, terminals, transit, rail, freight mobility and a number of other projects. This plan will be on the ballot for your consideration in November.



The possible new taxes include up to \$100 per year license renewal fee, up to one-half percent general sales tax, tolls on new and existing facilities, and other sources.

Most of these funds will go to construction on major highways; some may go to transit-related improvements such as HOV ramps and pullouts. There are strong accountability measures in the new law to ensure that government does what it proposes to do, and gets it done on time and on budget.

Voters in the three counties will vote on both the new taxes and the projects that are proposed. It is not yet clear when this will be on the ballot.

SAFER SCHOOLS AND A SAFER COMMUNITY

In the wake of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, the Legislature approved a bill that makes it easier for state and local law enforcement officials to coordinate anti-terrorism activities with the federal government. Washington's open records laws were so liberal that the state attorney general

could not attend a meeting with the FBI to discuss prevention strategies for fear that those plans would become public.

The bill is a compromise that gives law enforcement the protection it needs to do its job while also protecting the civil liberties of law-abiding citizens.

The Legislature also approved an anti-bullying bill to help make our schools a safer place for our kids. It requires school



districts to have an anti-bullying policy, which many school districts like Lake Washington and Northshore already do. The state superintendent will write a model policy and create a web site to help the rest of our schools develop policies. While helping to keep our kids safe and in an environment conducive to learning, the bill respects the freedoms of those who want to speak out, in a civil manner, about issues that are important to them. While the bill was controversial to some, I believe that anyone who has been bullied because of their religious beliefs, their looks, their economic status, their gender or for any other cause will understand the reasoning behind the law.

SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS FOR NEXT YEAR

Here are some items I'm preparing for the next session of the Legislature:

- ➔ During the debate over the state's operating budget, I offered an amendment that would have dedicated \$1 billion of the \$4.5 billion the state will receive from the tobacco tax settlement to a prescription drug program for low-income seniors rather than short-sightedly consuming the money on a short-term budget fix; that's the kind of thing the tobacco money was meant for. The amendment failed on a party-line vote.
- ➔ Although the Legislature made some minor changes in penalties for auto theft, it was not enough to make a serious dent in the problem. I sponsored a bill, House Bill 2741 which would have removed driving privileges from juveniles convicted of motor vehicle theft. While the bill would probably not have been a deterrent to gang members, it should make a teenager think twice before going on their first "joyride." The House approved the bill 94-0, but it died in the Senate.
- ➔ The House also approved House Bill 2750, which would have given non-profit museums and performing arts centers, like the Kirkland Performance Center, some new fundraising options. The bill, which I co-sponsored, would have allowed cultural institutions to augment their income by renting their facilities to outside groups without losing their tax exempt status. That bill also died in the Senate.
- ➔ We continue to have a shortage of places for our kids to play soccer and other active sports that require a lot of space. I sponsored a bill, HB 2743, which would have allowed unused farmland to be used for playing fields provided no permanent structures are built on the land. My bill did not pass this year, but I will continue to look for solutions to help relieve the overcrowding on existing facilities.

2002 Session Report

**State Representative
Toby Nixon**

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

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